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241 by the Marias. It deals with the village community through its
651 mouthpieces, the headmen and the elders. Many have returned to
Bastar from the Chanda Maria country. The best sign which I
observed when I spent the first month of my 1934 furlough in the
Abujmar hills was that the long abandoned rice fields are all being
restored to cultivation. It is interesting to note that the headman
has never ventured to keep the commission for himself, but always
either divides it among the villagers, or by common consent spends
it on pork or liquor for a village feast.

241 In the Bison-horn country as a whole there is now as much
permanent and semi-permanent cultivation as *penda*, and the
patwaris have always been more accurate in their records. The
people are more sophisticated and ready to safeguard their interests.
The *penda* lands are fairly accessible, except in the hilliest parts.
It has been pointed out already that each piece of each *penda* site,
whether at the moment under bush or under crop, is now regarded
as the individual holding of some cultivator. The people have
many markets in their midst, and understand measures and seed
capacities. It has not, therefore, been necessary to apply the
poll-tax system there. A great deal could be done even there to
turn the people from shifting to permanent cultivation by recognizing
new permanent cultivation as an improvement.

Where the Hill Marias have started permanent cultivation they
have in general adopted the methods of surrounding Murias or
Bison-horn Marias, save that very few of them have
mastered or attempted to master ploughing, but
prepare the land with their *gudari* digging hoes.
A few now keep hired Rawat herdsmen, but do not
themselves tend, milk or work their cattle. If the
recognition of permanent cultivation as an improvement could be
combined with a determined attempt by the State to teach carting,
ploughing and milking, even among the Bison-horn Marias, shifting
cultivation would be greatly diminished.

243 When he does grow rice, the Hill Maria generally does not
312 irrigate it with water led from a storage reservoir or tank; his
method is rather to build his dam across a stream or waterway and
to cultivate the land above it. The illustration opposite shows
both sides of the dam made in 1930 for cultivation of this kind at
Tondrawada; the deep hole below the dam was made when its
predecessor was washed away by an abnormal flood. No water
flows here in the cold weather. First a wall of grass *tum*¹ was
erected along the length of the dam, and behind this a wall of *welma*¹
horizontal pole fencing, supported behind with thicker pole piles

¹ See p. 132 for definition of *tum* and *welma*.

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949

AW32 Gond AW32

Hill Maria

PLATE XIV



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TONDAWADA, HILL MARIA DAM FOR RICE CULTIVATION

Above Downstream face

Below Upstream face

[Facing p. 146]

AGRICULTURE

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243 driven into the ground ; these were buttressed further with slanting
 312 pole props with forked ends bearing against the vertical piles, while smaller forked poles were at intervals driven into the dam on either side of the piles, but below the slanting props. This vertical pole-revetting faced downstream. Against the upstream face of the grass *tum* earth was banked with a gentle slope and gently sloped off to ground level upstream. A large and nearly hollow tree-trunk was left in the middle of the dam, to act as a pipe to carry off excess water. They called the dam *naḍi*, and the tank *ore*. It was not built to store water, but to retain moisture in the tank-bed, and it was the bed which was cultivated, being dug all over with the *gudari* before the rains. The dam was still serviceable when I visited Tondawada in 1934, four years later, and other small rice plots had been made higher up the waterway by placing low mud dams across it. Though the village had shifted from the adjacent site and the *penda* slopes under cultivation in 1934 were far away, these rice patches were being prepared for cultivation in readiness for the 1934 monsoon.

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Though it has been said above that the Bison-horn Maria has as much permanent or semi-permanent cultivation as *penda*, there

Bison-horn
 Maria
 cultivation

are many tracts in his country where *penda* is his main occupation. All Gonds or Koitor, wherever I have met them, seem at heart to long to revert to the raising of the light millets off the ashes of felled timber ; though it is prohibited in the British districts of the Central Provinces, I have seen it in the *jagir* estates of the Chhindwara and Hoshangabad districts, and in the Nagpur district the prospect of being allowed to do this for the first year or two was in 1932 the best bait for attracting Gond settlers to a forest village in Ramtek tahsil and even to a *malguzar's* waste lands village in Saoner tahsil. So it would take little to make the far less advanced Bison-horn Maria abandon permanent rice cultivation and stick to *penda* on the hill slopes or *erka* on the plains ; and much of his semi-permanent cultivation is only *parka* cultivation of former *erka* lands necessitated by their final refusal to bear any more forest after years of shifting cultivation ; instead of at once applying permanent methods to the land, he cuts brushwood from other forests and brings them to the deforested land to burn instead of the brushwood it bore in former years. But in these *parka* fields he can raise only rice, not his beloved small millets. In his *penda* fields he sows only *kutki*, *Panicum miliaceum*, of the type sown as the main crop in the Abujhmar hills ; but in many places the forest growth felled for his *penda* is almost pure bamboo, and here instead of *kutki* he sows what he calls *gondku*, which I have not had identified.

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243 *kopar* or flat log is dragged by oxen over the field according as the seed has sprouted vigorously or slightly. In many parts of Bijapur and Dantewara tahsils the *lai* system of sowing is the normal rule. Bison-horn Marias also often take a *kopar* over their *parka* and *erka* fields after they have ploughed in the ashes after the first showers of rain, so as to ensure thorough mixing of the soil and ashes. Light or heavy rice is sown in the *weda* and *jhorki weda* fields according to its position; light rice ripening early is thus generally sown in the *jhorki weda*, which drains rapidly, and always in the dry *parka* lands. The mountain rices sown in *penda* and high-level *erka* lands cannot be acclimatized in the plains.

● 312 In the *Gazetteer* it was stated that the people of Bastar generally were very slow to understand the advantages of irrigation; land and rain are abundant everywhere except in the south. But of recent years many Bison-horn Maria villages have constructed small *mundas* or tanks, partly for irrigation, and partly to water their cattle; and tank-bed cultivation such as that in the Hill Maria village of Tondawada described earlier in this chapter is much commoner among them.

000 This completes this account of Hill and Bison-horn Maria agriculture. The Bison-horn Maria has a number of agricultural ceremonies to sanctify his various operations and of taboos like the Hill Maria, but far more, and, like his agricultural methods, more elaborate. They will be described in the chapter on religion; their recital in this chapter would have overburdened an already long account.

SUPPLEMENT

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Marias, Gonds, Marars, Mahras, Halbas, almost all communities were infected. At Jarawandi and in the villages of the Jharapapra and Aundhi zamindaris along the Bastar border many Maria and Halba villagers contrasted the Central Provinces Government's lack of care for them in Chanda and Drug districts with the anti-yaws and other public health work over the border in Bastar. It is of course only comparatively recently that doctors have recognized the existence of yaws as a distinct (and easily curable) disease which responds to treatment similar to the usual syphilis treatment; the *District Gazetteer*, for example, refers to the disease as 'a mild form of leprosy named "Gondi rog"'.¹

Another thirteen miles of forest track, fairly easily negotiated by cars, brought us from Bhamragarh to the large village of Lahiri,² the headquarters of a *Sendhia's patti*, as mentioned at page 287. Lahiri lies at the foot of the Abujmar Mountains, and beyond it no wheeled vehicles could proceed. Between Bhamragarh and Lahiri we saw several examples of the skilful *gatta* cultivation of the Marias, thus described in Lucie-Smith's 1869 Chanda Settlement Report:—

'In *gattas* the land above the dam is cultivated. To construct a *gatta*, a miniature valley with gently sloping sides, through which a stream flows, is chosen. The space between the banks of the stream is built up in the hot weather with trunks of trees, having their thinner end towards the point from which the current flows, and across these are fixed smaller logs and brushwood. The upstream face has thus a gentle slope to the front, while the rear face is almost perpendicular, and is sometimes strengthened by vertical stakes. The barricade is carried from four to eight feet above the level of the banks, and is then heaped with earth. As soon as the first rains have softened the ground, sods, about fifteen inches long by twelve broad and five thick, are dug with a heavy teak implement called a *katwa*, and with the sods wing embankments are built. These are run out in continuation of, and level with the log barricade, until the rise of the valley reduces their height to about a foot, when they are sloped off to the front and flanks; and pipes of *sohwa*, or *gougool* are put through. Similar *gattas* are constructed at convenient distances at other points of the stream, and if the situation be favourable, twenty of these *gattas* may be seen spanning the valley in regular series. Surplus water passes round the flanks of the *gatta*, and sometimes in floods, the stream tops the dams and cascades over. Rice is planted in the wet ground above the dam, and, where there is a succession of *gattas*, water, if required, is passed from a higher to a lower level through the wooden pipes in the embankment. Some of the *gattas* rise to twenty feet above the stream bed, and are very substantial structures, flooding large areas.'

This skill is slowly making its way among the Hill Marias, and the illustrations facing page 146 of this book of a Hill Maria dam at Tondawada in Bastar are really of a typical *gatta*, including the hollow tree-trunk pipe. That this traditional skill persists and has developed into a real irrigation technique has been shown by Rao

¹ *Chanda District Gazetteer* (Allahabad, 1909), p. 99.

² Spelt Lahiri on *Ordnance Survey of India*, Sheet 63A, ref. MV8455.

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Bahadur D. Lakshmanswamy in his 1922-4 Sironcha and Garchiroli Settlement Report, paragraph 31:—

'Agriculture in parts of these zamindaris is as thorough as in the most advanced *khalisa* tracts. One has simply to look at the extensive rice fields and *gattas* of the *Madias* [*sic*] to admire the almost mathematical levelling of their field embankments. The Maria Gond has a genius for rice cultivation. He selects the best *zilas* position area, and with an intuition for irrigation lays out his fields one below the other so as to utilize water from the field above to that lower down. A natural stream or spring of water is generally never allowed to go waste by him. He so embanks and diverts the supply by a system of well arranged water-channels as to utilise the whole supply for his rice area, however distant it may be. Even in the remotest part of the zamindaris agriculture has now developed beyond the domestic stage and assumed the commercial stage. The aboriginals constituting the greater part of the population of these zamindaris mostly live on the early rice, small millets and beans, while the heavy rice grown in the big *gattas* and embanked areas is exported to the markets.'

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Now it should be noted that this means that for his own subsistence the Maria still relied on the grains and beans dear to his heart, and grown by *dahi* or *jalapod* cultivation, which had not then been stopped except in parts of Ahiri. The growth of heavy rice as a commercial crop is yet another sign of the transition from an economy in kind to a cash economy. Of this the money-lender takes full advantage.

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For in these plains villages around Bhamragarh and Lahiri, besides Marias and Gonds there are nests of Teli exploiters, notably in the six villages of Lahiri, Mallampodur,¹ Kukurmata,¹ Arawara,³ Dodrai⁴ and Idadapalli.⁵ Many of these Teli money-lenders are now wealthy, as a result of small grain loans to the plains Marias and Gonds. The *modus operandi* is repayment indefinitely at rates of interest so high that the principal can never be repaid, while interest takes the form of a steady and heavy share of the debtors' harvest. Some of the Telis resort habitually to molestation of their debtors until the latter satisfy their yearly demand, but though molestation of debtors is now a cognizable offence under the Debtors' Protection Act, the police in their far distant police station at Etapalli never take action against molesting money-lenders. We have seen already on page 102 how these Telis' tentacles had spread to such Bastar villages as Nugor in Kutru Mar in the Indrawati valley, where there were big matting paddy bins in the main street in which all the rice seed of the village was stored on behalf of the Telis, who were free from time to time to remove all paddy from the bins, surplus to the Marias' seed requirements, while each Maria villager was free to help himself to seed on the understanding that at harvest

¹ References on *Ordnance Survey of India*, Sheet 65A:

1. MV7032

2. MV7054.

3. MV7055.

4 and 5. Not marked.

343 substantial and carefully tended buildings. Fowls, set in
 [23] funnel-shaped bamboo stands, share the house with the
 human beings.

II

241 The Maria's main source of livelihood is agriculture. The
 ancient and traditional method is axe-cultivation, whereby
 the people make clearings in the forest with their axes, allow
 the felled wood to dry, fire it shortly before the rains and
 then sow the seed in the ashes. Sometimes this is done in
 the very place where the trees are cut. Sometimes brush-
 wood is carried to a regular field and spread upon its surface.
 The Maria, living as they do in settled and often level country,
 have also many permanent fields which are embanked and
 [312] irrigated by artificial tanks. The Maria are very proud of
 these tanks, and they are a frequent cause of dispute which
 sometimes leads to murder. A great part of the Maria's life
 is necessarily spent in these fields and clearings, and little
 field-huts and platforms are erected in which whole families
 camp for weeks at a time watching the crops at night and
 cooking and doing their work by day. Everybody helps in
 the work. Beside the family there may be farm-hands, some
 [464] of a special kind such as the Lamhada, who serves for his
 [583] wife instead of paying the bride-price, and the Kabari who
 is a bond-servant working to repay a loan.¹

Besides agriculture, the Maria eagerly and successfully
 exploit the produce of the great forests in which they live.
 [222] There is nothing edible that they will not eat, fruits, roots,
 [262] tubers, leaves—they have a profound knowledge of the possi-
 bilities of natural produce. They are equally omnivorous in
 their attitude to meat. In the villages they keep pigs, goats
 and fowls, and they are fond of pigeons. They still (though
 they often deny it to outsiders) eat beef on all important and
 224 ceremonial occasions. Rats, squirrels and small birds are
 caught by the children and roasted and eaten with delight.

¹ The Kabari system, which is similar to what is called Bhagels in Hyderabad, Kamiauti in Bihar, and Gothi in Orissa and Madras, is open to grave abuses—men working a whole life-time to settle a debt which is not settled even by death, but descends to the sons—and is now controlled by the State.

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943

AW32 Gond AW32

Bison Horn Maria

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Girls fetching water at Bastanar

[Facing p.32]